648 not a dependency, and over which we hold no mandate, British interests are such that any display of truculence on the part of the rulers would be put down very peremptorily. On the other hand, the existence of an Arab League and the effectively close unity among Moslem peoples throughout the world, must incline British authority to tread warily. Any form of pressure which could be construed by Cairo propagandists as persecution, might easily lead to disturbances in the Arab world beyond Arabia, with unforeseen results.

648 511 The problem is a difficult one. Any reforms of communal life, such as the provision of schools, courts of law based on Western procedure, good roads, efficient water supply and sanitation, the provision of hospitals and pre-natal centres, municipal medical services, and a proper supervision over food supplies and control of prices, all of which are long-standing necessities, should be undertaken by the paramount rulers, the sheikhs, but they, for obvious reasons, are not anxious to diminish their personal incomes by such 'extravagances'.

The British Government, whose treaty 'rights' in Arabia are in reality confined to safeguarding the coasts from foreign aggression, and preventing acts of piracy, has only the rights of a tenant in the inland regions. It is true that active slavery is contrary to the agreement reached between the sheikhs and the British Government, and that for the perpetration of this or certain other 'international' crimes the British Government could exert pressure on the sheikhs, but it is doubtful whether, in these times of political freedom, we could persuade them to rebuild their towns and undertake similar expensive measures to create a healthy social order. On the other hand, the British Government benefits considerably from its commercial and military interests in the Trucial Oman Coast, and has a certain moral responsibility for the peoples inhabiting its zones of influence.

It would thus be quite possible to grant a British loan to the sheikhs for the express purpose of building up such essential public works as hospitals, schools, roads and efficient sanitation schemes, and to set up an organization to ensure that these schemes were properly carried out. The majority of the rulers would have no objection to foreign money being utilized for the improvement of their townships, provided the suspicion could be overcome that foreign influence and interference in internal affairs would not thereby be increased, and their own power and authority diminished. Any

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transport; there is no flat desert, as at Sharjah, suitable for an air-field, and the mountain ranges are too close for safe flying.

In parenthesis, I learnt that shortly after the Sheikh of Sharjah had agreed to lease his land to the British for the purposes of an airfield, he was secretly murdered by a hired assassin, who crept into his palace while he slept, put his eyes out with a red-hot iron, and slit his throat. The present ruler of Sharjah, Sultan bin Saqr, never sleeps without an armed bodyguard outside his room, and it is whispered that he is waiting to avenge the murder of his father. He has little doubt who instigated the crime.

An old retainer of the Khan Sahib's, a wrinkled Arab with a henna-dyed beard, Ali bin Achmed, came to talk to us. He is employed as a seaman and looks after the petrol dhow on which the emergency stocks provided by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company are stored. He is a distinguished-looking old man, with a fund of stories which he related to us as the sun sank slowly behind the sandhills and the palm trees leant in ragged silhouette against the sapphire-tinted horizon.

The Khan Sahib closed the shutters, lighted a perfumed coil of anti-mosquito powder, and hung a kerosene lamp from a hook in the ceiling. A slave brought us dishes of rice, steamed lamb, curry balls, chipatties, *haloua*, fruit and turkish delight, and, feeling ravenous, we ate in silence, seated on Persian rugs with our legs tucked underneath us in Arab style.

After the third cup of clove-scented coffee, we sat in the dim light, smoking cigarettes, while Ali bin Achmed puffed away at his tiny pipeful of hashish. He told us wild stories of shipwrecks on the rocks, and of pirates who plundered the unfortunate vessels and held the passengers to ransom; of British gunboats which shelled the village in reprisal and clapped the headmen in gaol. Then he spoke of the wild men of the mountains, the Shi'hou tribe, who seldom left their dark caves in the hills, and who lived on fish, wild honey and dates. They never mixed with the lowland Arabs, were greatly feared on account of their wild appearance and cruel habits, and were believed to be in league with a djinn.

'There is gold and tin in the mountains,' said Ali, 'but men will not seek for it on account of these wild ones. A man would be rich who dared to climb those cruel slopes and search for the gleaming metal. But, praise be to Allah, it would be a foolhardy enterprise.'

The Shi'hou tribe is a very ancient one, according to Ali, and

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

186 563 inhabited the mountain caves long before the present Arabs, who are mostly farmers and fishermen, came to live in the valleys and date plantations. It is said by some (he added) that they are descendants of Sinbad, the sailor hero of the *Arabian Nights*, who was born at Zubair, near Basra, where the Euphrates joins forces with the Shatt-al-Arab river. In these mountains the fabulous Giant Bird, *rukh* in Arabic, is said to have had a lair from which he would carry gold and precious stones, as well as pearls, to his island fortress near Aden.

'It was probably nothing more than a *na'qr* (eagle),' broke in the Khan Sahib with a chuckle, but Ali would have none of this.

'No, Sahib, it was a giant bird with a spread of wings that shadowed the land for miles and struck fear into the hearts of men,' he said, uttering a '*Bismillah*' to protect himself from evil.

'Tush!' said the Khan Sahib. 'Then it was a *na'sir* (vulture)', and Ali, thus affronted, fell into a sulky silence and puffed away at his pipe, and we did not hear more of his stories that night.

352 354 357 The Khan Sahib began to yawn sleepily and presently asked us if we were ready to retire. He conducted us along a white-walled gallery to our sleeping quarters, a low-ceilinged room containing half a dozen charpoys and a brazier of smouldering charcoal. Feeling drowsy, we undressed quickly and were soon half asleep. Outside the veranda a watchman chanted songs of praise to Allah; a pai dog bayed at the moon, and the fronded leaves of the palms whispered secrets to the night.

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

race into round-headed or long-headed types, Alpine or Mediterranean. One can find a dolichycephalic head in any part of China and match it with a hundred heads in India, Arabia, France, Zululand or England.

My own theory, and it is as good as that advanced by Bertram Thomas or any other Arabian traveller, is that there is not one Arab race, but many Arab races. The inhabitant of Arabia may be termed an Arabian for geographical purposes, but ethnologically he may belong to the African race, the Persian or Iraqi race, or even the Turkestan race. Generally speaking, what is known as the true Arab is a Semite whose ancestors inhabited the Syrian and Palestinian deserts; some settled in Arabia proper, migrating as far south as the Gulf, whilst others trekked across Egypt and made their home as far west as the Atlas mountains, calling themselves Berbers and Senussi.

The tribes of Oman, Aden and the Hadramaut are undoubtedly of partial Semitic ancestry, but there is strong evidence in their black, curly hair, heavier noses, dark-brown eyes and negritic lips of African origins. Apart from the vast slave traffic which was a feature of Arab economic life up to the late nineteenth century, trading between the African coast and southern Arabia was at one time the main source of prosperity and enabled the sheikhs to build their towns, harbours and pearling fleets.

In the days of Arab power, the southern sheikhs ruled the seas from Bombay to Madagascar; Zanzibar was captured by the ancestors of the present ruler of Muscat, and the sultan who rules Zanzibar to-day is a descendant of the same Saiyed family. It is evident that with this close connexion between southern Arabia and East Africa, which continued uninterrupted for many centuries, a widespread inflow of negro blood must have occurred. Arabs intermarried with their slaves, African merchants married Arab women, and only the upper and princely classes, as well as the nomadic desert tribes who did no trading, were able to preserve their Semitic purity of race. It is also quite probable that some of the aboriginal tribes or earliest settlers of Oman and the Hadramaut originally came over from the African continent.

The Arabs, like many other races priding themselves on their breeding are, in reality, by no means pure-bred; but in their case their racial pride and extraordinary tenacity of tradition has enabled them to escape the usual effects of a dilution of the national stock.

The pure-blooded Bedouin, the gypsy of the desert, whom